

**a) Revering writings on the Dharma**

Once we take refuge in the Dharma we should treat any written or recorded material that contains as little as four lines of the Dharma with the same respect and reverence as we would treat the actual words of the Buddha.

Even though the actual Dharma, as explained before, refers to Arya paths and cessations in the continua of those who have directly realized the ultimate nature of phenomena, in a wider sense they also refer to the teachings of the Buddha. The reason for this is that it is primarily in dependence on listening, contemplating, and meditating on these teachings that we are able to generate the *actual* Dharma (Arya paths and cessations). However, since we do not have the pure karma to receive teachings directly from Buddha Shakyamuni himself we need to rely on the written material passed down to us from the Buddha and other enlightened or highly realized masters. Therefore, we should be extremely mindful about treating these invaluable texts with great respect.

As Westerners we are not necessarily accustomed to treating Dharma material, such as books, handouts, CDs etc. with the same care Tibetans do. Most Tibetans would never place Dharma material on the floor, step over it, or throw it away. They keep Dharma texts, etc. neatly on high book shelves and do not place them lower than themselves. Even Tibetans with little or no education would be greatly uncomfortable to put Dharma material in places where one sits, such as on chairs, cushions, or beds; they would not carry these items in the same bag in which they carry their shoes, and would avoid tucking them under their arms, below their armpits.

Furthermore, there are many written accounts on how the past masters revered Dharma scriptures. It is explained, for instance, that whenever the great Kadampa Geshe Chengawa saw a scripture being carried he would stand up and put his hands together in respect. Later in life, when he was unable to rise, he would simply put his hands together.

Traditionally when a monastery buys the *Kangyur* (the collection of the teachings of the Buddha which, dependent on the edition, comprises 101 – 120 volumes) and the *Tengyur* (the collection of the commentaries by Indian masters which, dependent on the edition, comprises 220 – 250 volumes), the monks prepare the monastery the same way they would prepare when a high Lama like H.H. the Dalai Lama visits. The entire monastic compound is cleaned and the evening before the arrival of the scriptures the long ritual horns are blown. At the time of their arrival the monks burn incense on the roof of the monastery, play ritual music, and respectfully line the sides of the road holding khatas (ceremonial scarves). The abbot, incarnated lamas and other high monk officials wear their *choegoes* (the saffron coloured ceremonial robes), carry incense, and come out to receive the texts.

Therefore, in order to benefit from the teachings in the most effective way we should try to develop the same reverence toward any kind of Dharma material. We should be extremely mindful not to place anything on a text or move things, for instance a teacup, over it. We should never put Dharma books in places we walk or sit, such as the floor, beds, cushions or chairs. We should not mark a page by folding the edge of the page, touch a book with our feet, or even walk over it. We should not sell Dharma books for a profit, pawn them, or throw them away. If we want to dispose of Dharma material we should sell it for less or the same amount we originally paid, donate it to a library, or burn it.

Revering the Dharma also refers to honouring and respecting other Buddhist traditions. We should therefore, never criticise or belittle the practices, techniques, etc. expounded in the Theravada (Hinayana or Fundamental Vehicle), or in any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, i.e. Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug.

In fact, we should respect and honour any spiritual or religious system that teaches its followers to live a more ethical, meaningful and happy life.

**c) Revering members of the Sangha**

Once we take refuge in the Sangha Jewel we should also make an effort to respect and revere the Sangha.

As explained before, the actual Sangha (or the Sangha "in the strictest sense") refers to Aryas, i.e. those who have directly realized the ultimate truth of phenomena. However, it is unlikely that in our daily dealings with others we encounter many of these Aryas. Therefore, we should develop respect and reverence in particular toward the Sangha or assembly of monastics and other practitioners.

The Sangha, in a wider sense, refers to four fully ordained monks and nuns. *Four* fully ordained monks or nuns are the minimum amount of fully ordained monastics that have the authority to perform certain Vinaya rituals and give others the full ordination vows. In an even wider sense, the Sangha also refers to all ordained monastics (including novices), and in the widest sense, to all Buddhist practitioners.

Revering members of the Sangha therefore refers to honouring and respecting *all* the Sangha, the Sangha in the stricter *and* wider sense.

Regarding particularly the ordained members of the Sangha, they are explained to be indispensable for the survival of the Dharma. The reason for this is that, even though in order to follow the path and to attain liberation or enlightenment, a practitioner does not have to be ordained, in order for Buddhism as an institution to survive, monks and nuns are essential. Monks and nuns preserve the religious rituals and ceremonies, and even more importantly, keep alive the meaning of the teachings by extensively studying and debating them.

However, unfortunately, nowadays the numbers of monastics are dwindling and the monasteries and nunneries, inside *and* outside of Tibet, face great difficulties recruiting new monks and nuns. This unfortunate situation is considered to be one of the major signs for the rapid decline of the Dharma.

Therefore, even though among Westerners the majority of Buddhist practitioners are lay, it is extremely important for them to support and facilitate monks and nuns. Such support can of course only be effective when it is motivated by respect and reverence for monastics.

Unfortunately, however, it is not always easy to develop such respect, especially when monks and nuns do not behave the way we expect them to.

At those times we should try not to limit our respect to the person but to recall what they stand for; we should respect the vows and other symbols that represent the ordained Sangha, just as we respect Buddha statues and stupas as the representations of the Buddha.

Monks and nuns, on the other hand, should try their best to behave properly, keep their vows purely and be inspiring examples of Buddhist practitioners.

In general, we should try to develop respect and reverence for *all* Buddhist practitioners. We should not discriminate between followers of different traditions and consider our own tradition to be superior. In this way it is extremely important to not divide groups into 'ours' and 'theirs', for this is the foundation of sectarian and discriminative behaviour.

Furthermore, the ***Exhortation to Wholehearted Resolve*** says:

*Those dwelling in the forest, desiring good qualities*

*Should not scrutinize others' faults.*

*They should not think,*

*"I am superior, I am the best"*

*Such arrogance is the root of all unruliness.*

*Do not despise inferior monks*

*Or you will not attain liberation for an eon.*

*Such is the way of this teaching.*

Especially if we engage in a lot of meditation and spend long periods of time in retreat we should search our mind for pride and arrogance, for this can become a serious obstacle to our practice.

Though we may perceive numerous faults in other practitioners we should be careful about passing any judgement, for we do not know whether these practitioners are actually Bodhisattvas and whether their apparent faults are therefore mere reflections of our own shortcomings.

